



Trauma and Memory: Narrative Formation, Implicit Memory, and its Recall and Reconstruction of Self through "The Three of Us"

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ABSTRACT

This research delves into the film *Three of Us* using major psychological theories that deal with intricate issues of the relationship between memory, forgetting, and trauma. It starts with Caruth's idea of trauma as a delayed, incomplete experience; Freud's theory of repression; van der Kolk's concept of the body keeping traumatic traces; and Bartlett's model of reconstructive memory to examine how the characters not only struggle with their histories but also figure out their identities in the current time. The study emphasizes the role of the cinema as not only a narrative medium but also a psychological place where embodied memories, repressed feelings, and reconstructed memories become visible. The trauma of Shailaja, Pradeep, and Deepankar, the project, through their personal stories, shows how it affects emotional regulation, narrative coherence, and self-reconstruction. In the end, this paper is about how *Three of Us* is a film that portrays the fine but strong interaction between remembering, reliving, and healing.

1. INTRODUCTION:

- Memory, forgetting, and trauma have been some of the most seminal critical areas, considering the contemporary psychological research, given their implications in identity formation, over-generality, emotional regulation, and narrative coherence (Moore & Zoellner, 2007). Memory is a very strong institution embedded in our minds, which helps the individual to reclaim and retain an uncertain self



after trauma exposure (Kirmayer, 2016). Memory is not neutrally constructed; it adapts defensively, often paving a way to over-generality in autobiographical memory accounts. This serves to regulate intense negative emotions, creating momentary stability and emotional regularity. (Williams, 1996) Not merely psychologically, but socially too, collective memory significantly impacts the truths that history has left unrecorded. (Lacapra, 2016) Moreover, exposure to trauma often breaks or divides the sense of self, often returning in the form of body sensations, flashbacks, and emotional reactions (Kirmayer, 2016), suggestive of Freud's idea of repression and Bartlett's idea of reconstruction. Another marginalised idea in trauma studies has to be the transgenerational transmission of trauma. Psychologists unanimously believe that trauma has the tendency to shape the emotional development of people who have never truly understood or experienced it (Lacapra, 2016). Thus, the intersection of memory, forgetting, and trauma with psychology becomes significantly important in recognizing, understanding, and overcoming the aftermath of trauma.

Contemporarily, there exist several explanatory models that help understand the interplay of remembering, forgetting, and narrating. This paper deals with three major theoretical perspectives:

- a. Trauma and narrative by Cathy Caruth (1995-96),
- b. Theory of repression by Sigmund Freud,
- c. The Body Keeps the Score by Bessel Van Der Kolk to analyze how memory has been represented in the movie *Three of us* (2022).

One of the major contributors in the area of trauma is Cathy Caruth, who explains how trauma memory escapes the conventional storage and recall of events and how it differs in representation and expression. She explains trauma as an unassimilated experience whose representation precisely lies in its belatedness, as there is a delayed recognition and expression of trauma's memory in the form of nightmares, flashbacks, involuntary returns, and haunting images (Caruth, 1996). Initially, the trauma remains "unclaimed by consciousness," as there is a temporal gap called 'latency' between the occurrence of the event and its comprehension. In Caruth's words, "it is not the forgetting of reality that constitutes the wound of trauma, but precisely the reality that one can't grasp." (Caruth, 1996). She subtly puts forth the paradox of knowing through unknowing that governs a fact of life that is trauma, emphasizing that the one experiencing trauma knows something that is inaccessible to one's consciousness and is yet to be integrated into the narrative of self. A similar idea is also proposed by Freud, called 'Nachträglichkeit' (deferred action), which suggests that after the encounter of a similar event, the prior trauma reshapes



itself as more tragic (Freud, 1895/1950). Consequently, the narration is devoid of chronological sequences, thereby accompanied by a ‘narrative gap.’ Yet its narration is necessary, both ethically and for the survivor's healing. Accordingly, trauma crafts a shared psychic space when narrated.

Caruth’s framework provides an area for recognizing and analyzing why trauma is often portrayed as non-linear, fragmented, and dissociated in media, cinema, and literature.

Bessel Van Der Kolk offers a foundational contribution to trauma studies by arguing that trauma exceeds the limits of mental processing and leads to psychoneurological and physiological alterations, leaving its lasting imprints on the body beyond our minds. Subsequently, disruption in emotional regulation and rational analysis of trauma occurs, further leading to a continuous state of hyperarousal, where the body responds to even non-threatening stimuli as trauma itself (Van Der Kolk, 2014). This unfolds the reasoning behind flashbacks, nightmares, and dissociation. He positions trauma as an embodied account and not as an autobiographical memory account stored cohesively in our minds; its recall lies in its being relived physiologically and not merely remembered. The victims of trauma often have a lost sense of imagination and hope, where they feel drifted from even the routine norms. He reframes trauma as a psychosomatic experience, disintegrating the body from one's own identity, where bridging the gap between temporal gaps becomes an inability amongst the victims. Paradoxically and interestingly, he emphasizes that victims feel a relief from anxiety when re-exposed to it (Van Der Kolk, 2014). With the disruption in the relationship between emotions and physical sensations, a state called ‘alexithymia’ can predominate the minds of the victims.

This model, essentially, provides us a multidisciplinary approach to the interplay of trauma and memory through the intersection of psychobiology, psychiatry, and neuropsychology, expanding the horizon of possibilities within its discourse.

Complementary to these models is Bartlett’s theory of reconstructive memory, suggestive of memory being constructive instead of reproductive (Bartlett, 1932). He positioned memory as a construction of events formulated and influenced by cognitive structures called ‘schema’, constituting prior knowledge, expectations, cultural patterns, and momentary need. To infuse coherence in the memory, levelling (loss of details), sharpening (exaggeration of details), and assimilation (change of details) are undertaken to fit familiarity, coherence, and convenience (Bartlett, 1932). With the integration of the concept of false memories (Garry and Loftus, 1996), schema-driven construction can be comprehensively understood. Recall is not what we remember, but what we believe we remember. The ‘constructive episodic



simulation hypothesis' (Schacter & Addis, 2007) decodes that episodic memory serves as a launchpad to construct both past collections and imagined experiences. Bartlett's model is critical, as it underlies the very basis of the memory formulation and is crucial to the description of trauma and its impact on an individual.

Memory, being a dynamic construct, has its influence rooted in every minute and major thing that surrounds human existence. Memory has its influence from past traces and future expectations. These traces and expectations are fed somewhat by what the modern world calls 'cinema.' The act of remembering, too, is not passive; it is constantly guided, shaped, and stabilized socially through "cadres sociaux" (social frameworks). Since media and cinema stand as integral pillars of these social frameworks, the art of storytelling, aesthetic choices, and several techniques influence the way we perceive, process, and interpret the construct of memory (Halbwachs, 1992). Cinema acts as a producer of collective narrative, which remains embedded in one's memory. Media and cinema, through their impact on our minds, have the power to produce 'prosthetic memory,' which eventually becomes a part of our collective moral consciousness. (Landsberg, 2004) Through the movie "*The Three of Us*," subtly, we are taken through and beyond that moral consciousness that obstructs our ideas. Through the eyes of Shailja, the movie teaches us how remembering is tamed through what we are fed, while obliging the viewer to go beyond what is seen, felt, and remembered. This movie revolves around dementia-driven memory and compels us to introspect more on what is felt than what is remembered, through the medium of cinema. Through Pradeep, memory through maturity is explored. Lack of Shailja's recall is compensated by his vivid memory of their childhood unrequited love. Complementarily, Deepankar shows acceptance towards the repressed memory of Shailja, which was reconstructed with the aid of the trip to Vengurla. The movie, titled *Calculatively*, is a sample that offers exceptional details to be kept under the microscope. From subtle details like the usage of olfactory senses to major ones like the revival of identity through art (dance), this movie sets a premise beyond the neurological disease that Shailja was suffering from. This paper explores the intricacies of these characters with the interplay of memory, trauma, and forgetting through the above-mentioned theories.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

- The psychological study of trauma, memory and emotional functioning has been shaped by several major theoretical traditions. One of the earliest and most influential frameworks comes from Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory of repression. In *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Freud, 1900), he described repression as a mental process in which unacceptable wishes or painful experiences are



pushed out of conscious awareness. In later writings, Freud (1926) argued that repressed material does not disappear but continues to influence the behavior, anxiety, and interpersonal patterns. Contemporary psychoanalytic authors, such as McWilliams (2011), have expanded these ideas by showing how repression is often expressed through silence, avoidance, and emotional withdrawal, particularly in individuals navigating unresolved conflict or trauma. Psychoanalytic literature therefore offers essential insight into how internal conflict becomes woven into everyday behavior and relationships.

Beyond the psychological process of repression, trauma research has increasingly emphasised the physiological consequences of stress. Bessel van der Kolk's influential text *The Body Keeps the Score* (2014) demonstrates how trauma alters neural functioning, disrupts memory integration, and reshapes the body's instinctive responses. Van der Kolk argues that traumatic experiences are often stored not as clear narratives but as fragmented sensations, images, and emotional states, which explains why individuals may feel overwhelmed without being able to put their experiences into words. His conclusions are strongly supported by Bruce McEwen's research on stress and allostatic load. McEwen and Rasgon (2023) describe allostatic load as the cumulative wear on the body's regulatory systems produced by repeated stress. Their work shows that prolonged psychological strain can dysregulate the endocrine, immune, and autonomic systems, ultimately affecting cognition, mood, and memory. Together, these authors demonstrate that trauma cannot be understood solely as a psychological event. It is a whole-body phenomenon that disrupts the relationship between mind and physiology. This understanding of disrupted memory aligns with Bartlett's classic theory of reconstructive memory (1932), which argues that individuals do not recall events as exact copies but rebuild them using fragments shaped by emotion, cultural expectations, and present concerns.

Another significant contribution to trauma theory comes from Judith Herman. In her seminal text *Trauma and Recovery* (1992), Herman notes that trauma often fractures memory, identity, and interpersonal trust. She emphasises that the inability to articulate trauma is not a failure of will but a consequence of trauma's impact on the brain's capacity to organise experience into a coherent narrative. This idea closely aligns with narrative psychology, which highlights the central role of storytelling in constructing identity. McAdams (1995) argues that individuals do not merely remember life events but actively interpret them and organise them into a personal narrative that provides meaning. Similarly, White and Epston (1990) propose that narrative reconstruction is a key process in healing, as it allows individuals to reauthor experiences that once felt overwhelming or unspeakable. When repression, physiological dysregulation,



and narrative fragmentation intersect, a person's story becomes disjointed, and their sense of self is often affected.

These frameworks are also deeply relevant to the interpretation of film and visual storytelling. Scholars such as Caruth (1996) and Kaplan (2005) argue that cinema is uniquely capable of representing trauma because it can visually express silence, fragmentation, and bodily tension. Filmic techniques such as repetition, abrupt cuts, and nonlinear sequences mirror the psychological experience of trauma, particularly the disruptions in memory described by van der Kolk (2014). The absence of clear dialogue or the presence of gaps in a character's narrative can therefore be read as symbolic manifestations of repression or physiological overwhelm. When film portrays subtle gestures, pauses, or emotional absences, these may reflect the burdens described by McEwen and Rasgon (2023) in their research on chronic stress. The cinematic medium allows internal psychological states to become visible, making it an especially rich site for applying trauma and narrative theory.

Taken together, these bodies of literature provide a multidimensional foundation for understanding the psychological themes present in a film centered on three individuals. Freud's theory of repression explains how individuals may unconsciously conceal painful memories. Van der Kolk and McEwen's contributions emphasise that trauma is held not only in the mind but also in the body's physiological systems. Herman, McAdams, and narrative scholars illuminate how people attempt to restore coherence through storytelling, even when memory is fragmented. When applied to the film (*Three of Us*), these theories highlight how characters' internal conflicts emerge through silence, gesture, and narrative structure. This integrated framework allows the film to be interpreted not merely as a story but as a psychological landscape shaped by memory, embodiment, and the narratives individuals construct in order to live with their histories.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

Memory, Trauma, and Embodied Recall in *Three of Us*

1.Reconstructive Memory:

Reconstructive memory theory challenges the assumption that memory operates as a stable repository of past events. Instead, it conceptualizes memory as a dynamic and interpretive process in which recollections are continually reshaped by present emotions, contextual cues, and identity needs (Bartlett 1932, Schacter 1995). Remembering, from this perspective, is not the retrieval of an intact record but an



act of reconstruction that serves present psychological demands. *Three of Us* offers a nuanced cinematic articulation of this theory through Shailaja's return to her childhood town of Vengurla, where memory emerges not as a linear narrative but as fragmented sensations, emotional responses, and symbolic encounters. Shailaja's memories do not surface as clear or chronological recollections. Instead, they manifest through pauses, gestures, and fleeting impressions that blur temporal boundaries between past and present. Her neurological diagnosis intensifies this reconstructive process. Faced with the possibility of cognitive decline, Shailaja's engagement with memory becomes urgent and emotionally charged. She is not merely revisiting the past but she is actively reconstructing it in an attempt to stabilize a threatened sense of self. Memory thus functions as a meaning making process rather than a factual archive. This reconstructive quality is clearly articulated in her dialogue with Pradeep, where she says "Jab Mumbai mein thi, yahaan aane ki jaldi thi aur jab se yahaan aayi hoon, Mumbai ko miss kar rahi hoon." The contradiction embedded in this statement highlights how emotional states in the present reshape interpretations of both past and present. What Shailaja calls "home" shifts depending on her current location and psychological condition. This aligns with Neisser's (1994) argument that autobiographical memory serves self continuity and identity maintenance rather than objective accuracy. Her memories of Mumbai and Vengurla are reconstructed to negotiate longing, dissatisfaction, and unresolved emotional conflict.

The *jhula* (swing) scene further exemplifies reconstructive memory in action. When the swing abruptly stops, the disruption collapses temporal distance, forcing Shailaja and Pradeep into a symbolic reenactment of childhood dynamics. The memory that surfaces is not a literal replay of the past but an imaginative reconstruction prompted by bodily sensation and spatial context. Bartlett (1932) described memory as "an imaginative reconstruction built out of the relation of our attitude to a whole active mass of organized past reactions." The film visually enacts this principle, portraying memory as fluid, symbolic, and shaped by present emotional orientation.

2. Trauma and Narrative:

Trauma research emphasizes that traumatic experiences resist integration into coherent, linear narratives. Scholars such as Caruth (1996) and Herman (1992) argue that trauma disrupts narrative memory, resulting in fragmented recollections that emerge as sensations, images, or emotional states rather than complete stories. *Three of Us* reflects this psychological reality through Shailaja's oscillation between emotional composure and sudden distress when revisiting childhood spaces.



The well scene functions as a critical moment of traumatic recall. Before Shailaja can cognitively articulate any memory, her body reacts, her posture contracts, her breathing becomes shallow, and her gaze withdraws. The absence of verbal explanation underscores how traumatic memory often bypasses conscious narration. Rather than recounting an event, Shailaja experiences a physiological response that signals unresolved trauma.

This silence is narratively significant. Herman (1992) describes trauma as producing “speechless terror,” wherein experiences are encoded in sensory and affective systems rather than in language. *Three of Us* mirrors this phenomenon through prolonged pauses, minimal dialogue, and Pradeep’s hesitant questioning. When he asks, “Wapas kyun nahi aayi?”, Shailaja’s fragmented response “Pata...” marks a narrative rupture. The sentence trails off at the threshold of emotional pain, exemplifying Herman’s observation that trauma narratives often “break off at the point where the terror begins.” Even moments of apparent nostalgia are layered with unspoken tension. The film resists offering a complete explanatory backstory, suggesting that trauma does not always seek narrative closure. Instead, it persists as an emotional undercurrent that shapes perception and behavior. By privileging fragmentation over resolution, *Three of Us* aligns its narrative form with the psychological structure of traumatic memory.

3. The Body Keeps the Score:

Bessel van der Kolk’s (2014) theory of embodied trauma posits that traumatic experiences are frequently stored in the body as physiological imprints rather than as verbal memories. These imprints manifest through posture, muscle tension, breathing patterns, and sensory responses, often emerging before conscious awareness. *Three of Us* offers a compelling cinematic visualization of this concept.

Shailaja’s reaction to the well is immediate and bodily. Her physical contraction and irregular breathing precede any conscious recognition of distress, illustrating van der Kolk’s assertion that “the body keeps the score.” The memory is not cognitively accessed but somatically activated, revealing how trauma is relived rather than remembered. Throughout her return to Vengurla, Shailaja’s body functions as a repository of memory. Her hesitation before entering familiar spaces, her careful tactile engagement with objects, and her sudden stillness when exposed to certain sounds all suggest that memory is encoded at a sensory level. These microgestures communicate emotional truths that remain inaccessible to language, reinforcing the idea that the body often remembers what the mind cannot articulate.

Even moments of joy, such as swinging on the jhula, are infused with bodily vulnerability. The physical sensation reconnects adult Shailaja with her childhood self, collapsing temporal distance through



movement and rhythm. This embodied bridge between past and present reflects van der Kolk's (2014) argument that trauma does not eliminate pleasure but embeds it within complex emotional and physiological patterns.

Hence, *Three of Us* presents memory as a reconstructed, emotionally mediated process rather than a stable record of the past. Drawing on reconstructive memory theory, trauma studies, and embodied cognition, the film demonstrates that memory is shaped by present identity needs, trauma disrupts narrative coherence, and the body serves as a primary site of remembrance. Shailaja's journey is not simply a nostalgic return but a psychological reconstruction of selfhood. Through silence, gesture, spatial symbolism, and fragmented dialogue, the film suggests that healing does not require complete narrative clarity. Instead, it emerges through an acknowledgment of embodied residues and emotional truths that persist beyond language. In doing so, *Three of Us* offers a profound meditation on how memory, trauma, and identity remain in constant dialogue across time.

4. METHODOLOGY:

The paper used a qualitative thematic analysis to examine some pivotal scenes from the film *The Three of Us*. The scenes that reflected the core psychological themes of memory, forgetting, and trauma were chosen for the analysis. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework, the researchers first familiarized themselves with the film by watching it multiple times and noting emotionally charged and memory-laden moments. Scenes were selected based on their theoretical relevance, instances where memory was distorted, trauma was implied, or bodily responses revealed unspoken pain. These moments were treated as "codable" units because they aligned with the theories. Initial codes were generated from dialogues, visual cues, and character behaviour, and then grouped into broader themes such as fragmented recollection, embodied trauma, and narrative silence. Thematic patterns were reviewed across selected scenes to ensure consistency and theoretical relevance. This approach allowed for a structured yet subjective reading of the film, linking storytelling to psychological theory.

5. ANALYSIS:

1. The Swing Scene: Memory, Repression, and Relational Recall

The swing scene functions as the film's distilled thesis, a single *mise-en-scène* that carries the weight of the narrative's emotional economy. As a symbol, the swing indexes motion, return, and rhythm, as well as the temporal suspension; it is a small appliance of continuity that refuses linear closure.



Psychologically it stages the coexistence of remembering and forgetting; it literalizes how memory is negotiated between bodies rather than simply stored inside an individual mind. The scene unfolds on three registers, each mutually informing the others: the symbolic, the somatic, and the relational.

Symbolically the swing is life made visible, a mechanism of pendulous time. Its back-and-forth is not mere movement but an image of repetition compulsion, of return, of the human tendency to orbit around an event rather than pass it. The motion erases teleology; it makes the past and present contemporaneous, and therefore it offers a formal corollary to trauma theory's critique of linear narrative. The swing's ropes are symbolic cords of attachment, linking people to places and to one another, tying memory into a network. The act of sitting on the swing is an acceptance of being moved by history; it is an embodied concession that life continues with memory as an undercurrent rather than a headline.

Metaphorically the exchange "Mai yai bhi bhool jaungi" and "Main yaad rakhunga" performs a quiet theatricality. Shailaja's assertion of forgetting reads as a defensive metaphor; it is a ritual of self-preservation where memory is framed as a liability that can be relinquished. Her language converts trauma into an object to be set down. The redistribution is a central metaphor of relational memory, the idea that remembering is sometimes outsourced to loving witnesses and that ethics enters memory through care. The metaphor extends further; the swing becomes a public domestic altar where personal history is not erased but reallocated.

Psychologically the scene is a compact lesson in how memory, repression, and the body interact. Shailaja's words announce cognitive intention, a will to expunge, yet her physiology contradicts the claim. The film makes this contradiction visible through microgestures, breath patterns, colours and the actor's vocal texture, thereby dramatizing van der Kolk's proposition that trauma is somatically lodged. Her lowered gaze, the catch in her breath, and the involuntary tremor in her hands are not incidental; they are the primary data of embodied recall. Freud's model of repression helps explain why she chooses forgetting: repression functions as an ego defense that protects agency at the cost of internal split. But the camera insists that the split remains; the unconscious reasserts itself through the body even when speech disavows it.

From Bartlettian and reconstructive perspectives, the sentence "I will forget" is itself an act of narrative reconfiguration. Forgetting here is not absence; it is new narrative work, a redrafting of memory to fit present survival. Brown and Kulik's idea of flashbulb memories is visible in the scene's asymmetry; Pradeep's pledge gestures to the way certain moments are seared with clarity for one participant while



remaining fugitive for another. This asymmetry is psychologically rich; it shows how shared events do not collapse into shared memory, they fracture, and the pieces are distributed according to affective investment and capacity for bearing.

Possible research moves from here include a focused paragraph tracing short-level evidence of somatic cues, a comparative reading with another scene that externalizes a flashback, and an ethical inquiry into whether custodianship of memory becomes a form of emotional labor.

2. The Well Scene: Somatic Memory and Spatial Triggers

The well scene:

When Shailaja encounters the well, her response is immediate and visceral, marked by a sudden shift in her physical comportment. Her breathing becomes shallow and noticeable, and her body instinctively curls inward, as though attempting to protect itself from an unseen threat. This reaction occurs before she consciously processes why the well unsettles her, suggesting that her body recognizes danger or distress long before her rational mind does. Such a moment illustrates how traumatic memory often bypasses conscious thought, surfacing instead through involuntary bodily reactions. As van der Kolk (2014) argues, trauma is not merely a narrative stored in memory but an embodied experience that becomes imprinted on the nervous system. Shailaja's physical contraction demonstrates how the body keeps the score, responding automatically to reminders of past pain even when the individual believes those memories have been suppressed. The body's response at this moment indicates that Shailaja's trauma has not been resolved but merely buried. Although time may dull the sharpness of traumatic experiences, it does not erase them. Instead, these experiences remain embedded in the body, emerging unexpectedly when triggered by familiar stimuli. In Shailaja's case, the well acts as such a trigger, activating a physiological response that precedes conscious understanding. This aligns with van der Kolk's (2014) assertion that trauma survivors often experience intense bodily sensations such as changes in breathing, posture, or muscle tension when confronted with reminders of their trauma, even if they cannot immediately articulate the source of their distress. Her reaction therefore reveals the persistence of trauma as a living, embodied presence rather than a distant memory.

At the same time, Shailaja's return to the well reflects a complex emotional impulse: a desire to reconnect with fragments of her childhood that remain unresolved. Familiar objects and spaces often serve as anchors to the past, holding emotional significance that transcends their physical form. The well is not merely a structure from her childhood environment but a symbolic site where memory, emotion,



and identity converge. By returning to it, Shailaja is unconsciously drawn toward a confrontation with her earlier self, suggesting an internal struggle between avoidance and the need for acknowledgment. Trauma frequently generates this tension, as individuals may both fear and seek the memories that have shaped them (van der Kolk, 2014).

Symbolically, the well mirrors Shailaja's internal state. It is still, silent, and seemingly calm on the surface, yet it carries the weight of everything it has witnessed over time. Much like Shailaja, the well contains depths that are hidden from immediate view, suggesting stored experiences that remain powerful despite their quietness. This metaphor emphasizes the nature of trauma as something that may grow muted but never entirely disappears. Rather than existing solely as a cognitive memory, trauma persists through physical sensations and emotional responses that resurface in subtle, involuntary ways. Shailaja's shrinking posture and altered breathing serve as outward signs of an inner conflict she has long attempted to suppress, reinforcing van der Kolk's (2014) observation that trauma is often "internal and embodied rather than verbally articulated". Furthermore, the scene underscores the powerful role of spatial memory in triggering emotional recall. Certain locations retain sensory imprints, sounds, textures, smells, and visual details that become inseparable from the experiences once lived there. These sensory cues can evoke emotional responses with striking immediacy, bypassing logical reasoning. For Shailaja, the well functions as a site of emotional anchoring, a place where unresolved memories have remained fixed over time. Standing before it forces her to confront feelings she has deliberately distanced herself from, revealing how environments can act as catalysts for remembrance. Trauma, as this moment illustrates, is often tied to specific locations that silently preserve the echoes of past experiences, waiting to be reactivated when one returns to them (van der Kolk, 2014).

In this way, the well becomes more than a setting within the narrative; it transforms into a psychological landscape that exposes the enduring impact of trauma on Shailaja's body and mind. Her involuntary reactions reveal the limits of conscious repression and highlight the truth that healing requires acknowledgment rather than avoidance. The scene ultimately reinforces the idea that trauma is not confined to memory alone but is deeply intertwined with the body, space, and sensory experience. Through Shailaja's encounter with the well, the narrative powerfully illustrates how the past continues to inhabit the present, shaping identity and emotional response in ways that are quiet, embodied, and profoundly persistent. Beyond its immediate emotional impact, the scene at the well can also be understood through the lens of implicit memory, a form of memory that operates outside conscious awareness and is expressed through bodily states and emotional responses rather than verbal recall.



Unlike explicit memory, which allows individuals to consciously narrate past events, implicit memory manifests as sensations, reflexes, and affective shifts that arise automatically when the nervous system detects familiar cues. Shailaja's reaction exemplifies this process: she does not actively remember or narrate a specific incident, yet her body reacts as though reliving an unresolved experience. Trauma theorists note that such memories are often encoded during moments of overwhelming stress, when the brain prioritizes survival over coherent storytelling, resulting in memories that are fragmented and somatic rather than linear (van der Kolk, 2014). The well, therefore, operates as a trigger for implicit memory, activating emotional responses that Shailaja cannot immediately rationalize. This suggests that trauma does not demand conscious recognition to exert influence; instead, it quietly shapes perception, posture, and emotional regulation from beneath awareness. Her encounter with the well illustrates how the body remembers what the mind has not yet processed, reinforcing the idea that healing requires attention not only to narrative reconstruction but also to bodily awareness and emotional regulation. In this sense, the scene reveals the limits of language in addressing trauma and emphasizes the importance of recognizing non verbal expressions of distress as meaningful psychological communication rather than mere physical reactions.

3. The Auto Rickshaw–Train Sequence: Fleeting Memory, Reconstruction, and Emotional Residue

The auto rickshaw-train scene is a succinct yet powerful gate in the movie, which can potentially help the viewer analytically pierce through the truest essence of the movie. It assembles multiple narratives, affective sites, and philosophical traces within a deceptively simple visual arrangement. The scene begins with Pradeep's momentary look at the two children, a girl and a boy, riding bicycles. As the darkness fades into them, while Pradeep is engrossed in his present as he is crafting something for his wife, his love for Shailja and memories are represented through those children. The view of them passing by is the root of his inner conflict. As the camera shifts back to those children, merely the sound of the train is followed, representing the fleeting nature of the moment. The children are not the literal stand-ins of Pradeep and Shailja but are the metaphors for what no longer exists. The train's sound arriving before the image conditions the narrative meaning. As Bessel Van Der Kolk argues, the body often stores memories as a residue and not as a verbalised recollection (Van Der Kolk, 2014); the sound of the train complements Pradeep's emotional memory, which is registered through his subtle gaze. This scene positions the tension between what is felt yet unspoken and what is seen. The children's disappearance, followed by the train's arrival, is what memory at its core is : fleeting, repressed, and reconstructed (Barlett, 1932). As the train (a symbolic trace of the past) passes through, the scene positions the



enclosed rickshaw (the present) in the center. Although it is not the literal translation of reconstruction of memory, it encapsulates the conditions under which it occurs: the transient traces of the past and the stillness of the present define the construction of memory. The subsequent close-up of Shailja through the window of the rickshaw subtly presents the memorial residues that can be enclosed within her. The sober curve of her lips is indicative of the past traces her body holds even when her mind has shed them. (Van Der Kolk, 2014) The train's movement effectively cuts through the emotional field enveloping her.

Her eyes are a witness of the memories' departure, yet she is enduring and at most accepting it. After the creation of a momentary obstruction, the rickshaw remains still for a while. Only then does the toll lift, allowing forward movement. The forward movement in life towards acceptance and contentment. Because of the intersection of various elements in the scene, it escapes the confinement of representation, offering an argument that memory is an amalgam of cognition, sensory stimulus, and bodily narration, and remembering is constituted by these elements.

4. The Beach Sequence: Origin, Loss, and the Embodied Trace of Memory

The beach sequence, where Shailja's treading on sand reaches out to Pradeep's poetry, beautifully intertwines the film's two most indisputably distilled concepts: 'udhgam' (the origin) and 'the end.' As the sand of Vengurla molds itself to hold Shailja's steps, her solitary movement and the rush of waves stage evanescence against permanence. The mise-en-scène immediately evokes this conflict. The vast beach, moving insouciantly, evokes the permanence of the imprints that are inundated in the sea, while Shailja's calculative steps show the temporary marks that the next wave will engulf. She is still feeling the impact of the past burden that resides in her (Caruth, 1996); while her mind has repressed it long ago, she still is connecting to it through the subtle footsteps, the sudden pauses, and the sudden reflections (Van Der Kolk, 2014). The poem captures the accepted tragedy of Shailja; her dementia, no matter how long she stays, will feed on her memory bit by bit. 'Kal to tabhi aayega jab aaj khela jayega' positions the future enclosed with the present. Only when the present is deconstructed will the future bloom. But here's the paradox: her present is slipping even before its deconstruction, just like her past. 'Laakh moti jeb mai bharke tu rakhle chahe to, aakhiri din muthi mai bas ek thela jayega' further intensifies the tragic nature of the disease. No matter how long she explores and recollects her past, in the end, the disease will take it along. Vengurla, particularly the beach, becomes the 'udhgam' (the origin) of her psyche—the one that is embellished with past memories will itself become the end of the unsaid. She is the origin of the poem, yet her own origin is slipping away from itself; she is slipping away from herself. The tragic beauty of



the scene precisely lies here: the mind may forget, but the body doesn't, and poetry and love register what cannot be saved.

5.

In *Three of Us*, the early scene in which a father speaks to his son approximately thirteen minutes into the film introduces one of the film's most profound thematic concerns which is: The impossibility of separating the present self from the past, even when one physically revisits earlier spaces or memories. Through this interaction, the film articulates the idea that time does not function as a linear progression that can be reversed or neatly revisited. Instead, the present continuously accompanies and reshapes any engagement with the past. The father's reflection suggests that returning to places associated with earlier stages of life does not allow an individual to experience the past as it once was but rather, such encounters are inevitably filtered through present consciousness, emotions, and lived experience. This moment establishes a philosophical foundation for the narrative, positioning memory as an active, evolving process rather than a static archive that can be accessed unchanged. This idea aligns closely with contemporary psychological and trauma based understandings of memory, which argue that recollection is always reconstructed in the present rather than retrieved intact from the past. Van der Kolk (2014) emphasizes that memory, particularly when shaped by emotionally significant or traumatic experiences, is continually reinterpreted through the body and mind's current state. Thus, when an individual revisits a familiar place, the experience is never purely nostalgic; it is instead shaped by who they have become, what they carry emotionally, and what remains unresolved. The father's insight reflects this understanding, suggesting that the present self inevitably follows the individual into the past, influencing perception and emotional response. In this sense, the film resists the notion that one can momentarily escape the present by returning to childhood spaces, proposing instead that such journeys often intensify self-awareness and emotional confrontation.

This scene also complicates traditional representations of memory as comforting or restorative. Rather than presenting the past as a refuge, *Three of Us* frames it as something that must be reckoned with under the weight of present knowledge and emotional maturity. The father's words imply that memory is inseparable from responsibility: to revisit the past is to encounter it with all the awareness, regret, and insight that the present brings. This perspective resonates with trauma theory, which suggests that emotionally charged memories are not frozen in time but are continually reactivated and reshaped by present circumstances (van der Kolk, 2014). As a result, the act of remembering becomes less about



reliving and more about reinterpreting, often revealing gaps, silences, or discomfort that were previously unrecognized.

Furthermore, the scene underscores the film's broader meditation on identity as something formed through continuity rather than rupture. The father's reflection implies that individuals do not leave versions of themselves behind as they move forward in time; instead, earlier selves remain embedded within the present identity. This challenges the idea that growth involves complete detachment from the past. Instead, *Three of Us* suggests that identity is cumulative, shaped by layers of experience that coexist rather than replace one another. Memory, in this framework, becomes a bridge between past and present rather than a doorway back in time. The present self, shaped by loss, experience, and emotional complexity, inevitably mediates any encounter with earlier moments of life. This thematic concern gains further depth when considered alongside theories of embodied memory. Van der Kolk (2014) argues that memory is not stored solely as narrative but is deeply embedded in bodily sensation, emotional response, and physiological reaction. The father's insight reflects this embodied understanding of time: even when the mind attempts to revisit the past, the body carries the present. Emotional maturity, accumulated stress, and unresolved experiences shape how familiar environments are perceived and felt. Thus, the present does not merely accompany the individual into the past intellectually, it does so physically and emotionally, shaping responses in ways that may not be consciously articulated.

The scene also subtly critiques the illusion of control over memory. By suggesting that the present inevitably intrudes upon the past, the film implies that memory cannot be selectively accessed or curated. This aligns with trauma theorist Cathy Caruth's (1996) assertion that memory often emerges involuntarily, shaped by repetition and emotional residue rather than deliberate recall. Although the film does not explicitly frame the moment as traumatic, it gestures toward the broader idea that emotionally significant memories resist containment. The past, therefore, is not something one visits on one's own terms; it responds, reshapes itself, and demands acknowledgement. On a structural level, this interaction between father and son serves as a thematic blueprint for the film as a whole. It prepares the viewer to understand subsequent encounters with memory, place, and identity not as attempts to escape the present, but as moments of confrontation shaped by it. The father's words function almost as a quiet warning: returning to the past will not restore what once was, but will instead reveal how profoundly the present self has been altered by time. This perspective invites a more introspective engagement with memory, one that recognizes its emotional complexity rather than idealizing it. The scene emphasizes that healing, understanding, or closure does not arise from physically revisiting old places, but from acknowledging



the continuity between past and present. By asserting that the present inevitably follows the individual into the past, *Three of Us* reframes memory as an active, lived experience rather than a passive recollection. The film thus presents time as psychologically intertwined rather than sequential, suggesting that the past survives within the present not as a preserved image, but as an influence that shapes perception, identity, and emotional response. Through this thematic lens, the father's reflection becomes central to the film's exploration of memory, underscoring the idea that one cannot return unchanged and that recognition itself is a crucial step toward self-awareness.

5. LIMITATIONS

Despite offering a nuanced approach towards the intricacies of memory, trauma and forgetting through the depth of 'Three of us', this study is subject to psychological, methodological, and theoretical limitations worth acknowledging.

Interpretive subjectivity : The study relies on qualitative thematic analysis and in-depth study of selective scenes from *Three of us*. While this method paves a way to comprehensive and illustrative conceptual understanding, much of the conclusions are pertaining towards the subjective interpretation of the context the movie is set in. Themes are chosen based on researchers' convenience and subjective understanding of memory, trauma and forgetting. This approach undermines the universal agreement on the claims. Consequently, the interpretations cannot attain universality.

Cultural and contextual specificity : The movie *Three of us* is at its core a product of Indian cinema, embedded in the sociocultural and linguistic specificities of Indian culture. The movie sets a premise to analyse the contextual cause of dementia and its impact on the person and related. Concepts love, memory, forgetting and the effect of trauma are primarily culturally mediated. Subsequently, the study, too, is culturally influenced and doesn't offer a general interpretation devoid of bias and certain specifications. This cultural limitation limits the holistic capture of psychological frameworks of memory and trauma.

Single text focus : Although *Three of us* subtly provides a pavement to explore the nuances of memory and forgetting, this study is confined to a single film. While this movie is a versatile capture of these psychological frameworks, this study cannot claim to be a general representation of memory in cinema. A comparative analysis would unleash the unattended fragments. This study at its core cannot be indicative of the different aspects of memory representation in cinema as a whole.



Retrospective application of theoretical frameworks : This study carves theoretical frameworks to fictional characters rather than empirically observed individuals. While cinema often mirrors the realm of the complexities of such conditions, detailed capture of reality and lived experiences somehow remains unattended. Characters are narrative expressions shaped by direction, screenplay, and internalization by the actors, which significantly limits the horizon of exploring the nuances linked to real experience of the frameworks.

Methodological limitations : The study is undertaken on selected scenes based on theoretical framework and not the entire film. While this approach brings focused analysis into the study, it risks overlooking other moments which carry the details pertaining to the essence of film. The choice of study inherently reflects inevitable analytical prioritization and not the comprehensive decoding of the film.

These limitations do not undermine the study's contribution but break the walls of confinement by deepening its implications for future research. By acknowledging these limitations, the paper positions itself as an interpretive theory driven account and not a definitive truth.

6. CONCLUSION:

Three of Us changes the concept of memory from being a fixed archive to an intimate, relational, and bodily process that is basically the layers of time, space, and gesture. The film, through such scenes as the swing, the well, the auto-rickshaw and passing train, and the beach, posits memory as something that is highly vulnerable yet indomitable at the same time. Every place turns into a

sensory device that uncovers the past not through breathing, posture, silence, or very quick expressions, but rather through relying on these because the film does not depend on the explicit narration.

Throughout these scenes, the film keeps showing that memory is a matter of negotiation between the brain and body: things that the brain tries to suppress, the body still keeps. By doing so, it talks and agrees with the concepts of trauma studies and psychological theory, the main idea being that memory becomes visible through movement, surroundings, and the presence of others.

In the end, Three of Us is very close to the idea that memory is not an individual act but the shared labour of care. The most emotional aspect of the film is the struggle between holding on and letting go, i.e., between what escapes and what remains carved in the body. Through its fragile story and metaphorical places, it asserts that even when memory is not there, its traces continue to influence bonds, identity, and the door to be able to accept.



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